

11/13/14

Division for the Visually Impaired – IEP Taskforce Comments:

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On October 9th, two parent advocates issued public comments to the IEP taskforce regarding the status of education services to students with visual impairments in Delaware. Mrs. Debbie Harrington stated the following at the meeting:

“I met with a 4th grader and her mother. The child has an eye condition that leaves her with poor sight in her left eye and poorer sight in her right. ... She is not excelling in school believably because she does not have the right services. I asked the mother who is the vision teacher to which she replied, “she does not have one.” I followed with several other questions such as:

Has she had a functional vision test? No.

Has she had a learning media assessment? No

Does she get braille instructions? We were advised that braille is not required. Does she get large print? She has a computer in class that they use to enlarge the print, but not at home.

Are her books provided in large print or electronically? No, she only gets papers in large print.

What do you do at home for her homework? I end up writing for her and reading to her.

Does she have an orientation and mobility instructor? What is that?

The child is in the 4th grade. The mother has been doing this for at least 3 years and she is totally unaware of what to ask for in terms of services and in terms of an IEP team make--up. Can you fathom what the child will face by the time she reaches high school?”

- Upon receiving this information DVI has looked into the status of this student's services with our agency. This is a student that has been receiving vision services in an educational setting her entire life from the Division for the Visually Impaired and her teacher for the visually impaired has been in attendance at all of her IEP meetings. She has two functional vision evaluations and learning media assessments updated within the past three school years. Based on both her medical eye information as well as functional vision assessment results, she is able to identify 10 point print and does not have a progressive eye condition. In order to minimize visual fatigue, she has been consistently been provided with materials in 16 point font from our agency. At the same time, she has been identified with a learning disability in both reading and math and has been receiving significant academic support through response to intervention for the past three years. She is not currently a candidate for braille based on the data shared with the IEP team and their subsequent recommendations. In addition this student has been assessed to read well with large print (16 point font), which has been evidenced by her ongoing optometric assessments conducted by a qualified physician and professional assessments from our staff. Our teacher for the visually impaired continues to provide consultative services to the student, school personnel, and related service providers approximately once a month. The student will be reassessed for orientation and mobility services this school year though it is undetermined whether or not she will have a need for this service due to her current independence in the school/home/community environments given her visual acuity.

In addition, Mrs. Sonya Lawrence provided the following statements at the IEP taskforce meeting relevant to education services for students with visual impairment and our agency:

“Although there are a number of issues upon which this Task Force may focus, I call your attention to one very important matter: the need to establish best practices with respect to identifying, obtaining, and implementing appropriate forms of Assistive Technology for blind and visually impaired students...Rather than attempt to manage unwieldy braille textbooks that sometimes have 4-10 volumes for one classroom textbook, the student can now, through an effectively organized partnership with Delaware's AIM Center and the Materials Management Center of the Division for the Visually Impaired, access his or her textbooks electronically. Visually Impaired students can utilize a PC or IOS device to read their course materials using proper text enlargement, contrast, format, and voiceover features that enhance their ability to effectively access course materials through use of their primary learning channels...In Delaware, however, the resources for obtaining, implementing, and effectively utilizing Assistive Technology for all blind and visually impaired students are extremely scarce...

I urge you to make recommendations to ensure that:

1. Each qualified blind and visually impaired student educated in the State of Delaware receives, on at least an annual basis, an Assistive Technology Assessment conducted by a qualified professional with experience in the area of AT for blind and visually impaired students;
2. Each IEP team charged with ensuring that blind and visually impaired students in the state receive FAPE undergo at least one training session per school year that will facilitate a working understanding of the use of AT in classroom, home, and other educational settings to ensure that opportunities for appropriate use of AT for each student receives appropriate consideration and action;
3. The Division of the Visually Impaired and the Delaware AIM center maintain an effective, transparent, and accessible program to ensure that students who are blind and visually impaired maintain barrier-free access to instructional materials designed to facilitate receipt of

appropriate learning materials in a timely and effective manner. Each LEA serving blind and visually impaired students should also be required to undergo appropriate annual training sessions related to the means through which such materials may be obtained for blind and visually impaired students; and

4. The Delaware Department of Education and/or the Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired maintains a program through which current AT Specialists in LEAs receive, on at least an annual basis, education and training on the identification and implementation of appropriate AT for blind and visually impaired students. In addition, each Teacher for the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and other related-service providers working in the state of Delaware should be required to undergo training, at least annually, focused upon identification, implementation, and evaluation of AT for use by blind and visually impaired students in the educational and home settings.”

- **In reviewing these recommendations, DVI supports Mrs. Lawrence’s statements given that the required resources are dedicated to upholding these items as they are in line with best practices and supports the needs of our student population. Our agency will gladly work with this taskforce and other interested stakeholders in developing model programs and educational services for the visually impaired in Delaware.**
- **Thank you for your time and consideration.**